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ABSTRACT

A study examined whether modeling desired teaching strategies would produce future teachers who could confidently go into a new classroom and set up a writing program. Four weeks of class time in a teacher education class at Northeastern University in Oklahoma were used to teach the writing process through the use of a writer's workshop. Results indicated that students learned not only how to select topics, draft, struggle with revisions, edit and experience the joy of having a finished book, but also how to work with peers and use conferencing techniques. In addition, these students feel comfortable with authentic writing, and are able to use these techniques in their own classrooms. (PRA)

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Johnnye L. Morton

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D R A F T

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D R A F T

INTRODUCTION

What compels some classroom teachers to continue their education in order to become teacher educators? For some the compelling force is the desire to improve the education system. They want to become change agents, to have a greater impact on the education of children, and they are convinced that the best way to do this is to become college professors in teacher education programs. Many of these teachers go on to become frustrated professors.

The source of this frustration is the realization that most novice teachers do not use what they were taught in their university methods courses. Two colleagues and I conducted a survey to determine if our students really used what we taught them (Daves, Morton, & Grace, 1990). The results of this survey confirmed my suspicions. The knowledge that my students are not using what I taught them caused me great concern because I was one of those teachers who wanted to become a teacher educator in order to effect change. If this was not happening, what could I do to ensure that future teachers who come through my courses will have not only the knowledge but the courage to teach the way they were taught?

I began evaluating my teaching strategies. I realized that I was using the traditional mode of university teaching: lecture/test. I was <u>telling</u> my students that they must get their children actively involved in the learning process. I was <u>telling</u> them that they should be facilitators of learning not merely disseminators of knowledge. Yet I was not modeling those desired teaching strategies. As Kelly and Farnan (1991) note, there is often a discrepancy between how we want our students to teach reading and how we teach our university classes. I realized that if I wanted my students to implement desirable teaching strategies in their classrooms, I must use these same strategies when teaching my preservice teachers.

A major concern I had was that my students were not using writing effectively in their classrooms. I wanted to know if modeling the writing process would produce teachers who could confidently go into a classroom as a new teacher and set up a writing program. Since this course did not have a field experience, we did not have access to a classroom of children for me to model the teacher's role with actual children. We did the next best thing. I decided to block off four weeks of class time to develop a writer's workshop in my content area reading methods course.

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When I announced during the first week of class in the fall of 1989 that students enrolled in this class would write a book, they looked terrified. However, by the end of the course, a surprising number of them confessed that the writing of the book had been the most exciting part of the course and they felt confident they could set up a writer's workshop when they got their own class.

How did I get them from that first terrifying feeling to the feeling of satisfaction? The same way elementary teachers are successfully getting children to write. I took them through the writing process and for four weeks our classroom became a writer's workshop.

This paper is written with the assumption that the reader is already familiar with the concept of authentic writing and the writer's workshop.

Method

I began by reading aloud several books representative of different genre which could serve as good models for my students as they began to write their books. I chose several books by Seymour Simon and Byrd Baylor. I also shared my favorite book of poetry, Hailstones and Halibut Bones by Mary O'Neill. I choose the Seymour Simon books because they were excellent information books. I chose the Byrd Baylor books for the writing style and because these books are so adaptable to all grade levels and can be used so effectively in various content areas.

I shared parts of the book How Writers Write by Pamela LLoyd because I wanted my students to understand that writers write for different reasons, at different times, and under different circumstances. I also wanted my students to understand that even real writers struggle with topics, revisions, and writer's block. Through this book, my students were able to peek into the writing habits of some of their favorite authors.

We discussed the students' perceptions of themselves as writers. Most admitted to varying degrees of apprehension about writing. Few perceived themselves as writers. None had ever written a book. And so we began to write.

I modeled the topic choosing process. I didn't have to tell them that topics come from things about which we know and care a great deal. They drew that conclusion as I modeled my choice of topics. After pairing up and talking with a partner about things they liked to do or things about which they were "experts", they each developed their own topics list. They were free to write on any topic they chose, and any genre: poetry, fiction, or non fiction.

They used webbing to brainstorm their ideas. They drafted, conferenced with peers and teacher, they revised

and edited with peers and finally after four weeks, they proudly sat in the author's chair and shared their books. The audience knew exactly what to do as they told the author what they liked about the book and asked questions much as how they got the idea for that particular topic. I had been modeling this strategy for weeks in their individual conferences.

Conclusions

While a three-four week block of time in a college classroom does not exactly mirror the real world of the classroom, my students did get a feel of what it is like to select topics, draft, struggle with revisions, edit and finally experience the joy of having a "published" book.

Throughout the four weeks, they learned the value of talking with peers and getting, as well as giving, suggestions about writing. They learned conferencing techniques such as how to make positive comments about their peer's writing in their peer conferences as well as how to ask questions to get more information. They learned that by helping a peer revise a piece of writing, they got ideas for improving their own writing.

Some of that first group of students are now in their first year of teaching, and others are in their student teaching semester. I am currently tracking a select group of those former students. I am observing that they are indeed implementing writing in their classrooms. They are using journals and writer's workshops. They feel very comfortable with authentic writing and how to get it started and keep it moving along because they have been through the experience and they had a model for effectively guiding this experience. Another surprising observation is that some of these former students have continued writing books. At least two of them have books written which they are trying to get published. Modeling the writing process has far reaching effects.

Other professors are discovering the benefits of modeling desired teaching strategies (Scanlan, Ohlhausen, & Ford, 1990; Kelly & Farnan, 1991). University professors must continue exploring ways to help students become the teachers we train them to be.

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